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# THE PSYCHOLOGY

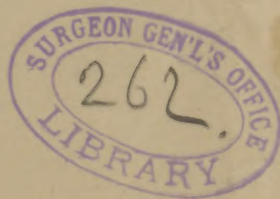
—OF—

## KATHRINA.

By THAD. M. STEVENS, M. D., of Indianapolis, Ind.

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# THE PSYCHOLOGY OF KATHRINA.

By THAD. M. STEVENS, M. D., of Indianapolis, Ind.

The psychological points of Shakespeare have been most ably treated by Drs. Tuke and Maudsly. A few other works have been analyzed in the same way. We propose to take portions of Dr. Holland's *Kathrina*, a text for the expression of our views upon certain questions of psychological interest.

The argument of this work (so far as it interests us) is the history of the hero from youth to manhood, also of his mother, and future bride—his father having died while insane. His mother evinced no signs of aberration of intellect until advanced in years. His wife, a religious enthusiast, dies as a Christian, and before death “views Heaven.”

The first point is with reference to the insanity of the hero's parents. One would naturally be led to look upon that insanity in one of two lights, first viewing it as a real event clothed by the author in the garb of fiction; that such cases of both parents being insane do exist cannot be denied, but we incline to another view of the authors intentions, viz.: placing it as a case of *contagious insanity*—where this condition was “caught” from the husband by the “wife,” not by means of an infecting germ, and of course not by “hereditary descent,” but through the influence of mind upon mind, which, in accordance with laws however illy understood are known to exist. We know that in the intercourse of two individuals the mind of each is influenced by that of the other. Certain faculties, before dormant or inactive are aroused, the attention is directed in certain channels, or fixed upon certain objects, and the individual commences to study the subjects thus presented, and to investigate the paths opened up to him, and in proportion as his interest is increased the mind is molded into a greater similarity to that of his associates—his *imitative* faculties are called into play; and as we copy from the dress or action of those we observe that which strikes us as points of beauty or fitness, until imperceptibly we are conformed to and resemble those we thus admire. So our ideas and opinions, whether intellectual or moral, are brought to the same standpoint, and resemble in a great degree the ideal which has influenced us.

This subtle influence is immeasurably increased when our emo-





tions are called into action, and friendship or love, which of themselves exert such a perturbing influence upon the mind, will when certain faculties are thus powerfully affected, increase them to a tenfold higher grade of activity and even urge them on to a point beyond that occupied by the original influencing mind; as family likenesses and lineaments are transmitted from one generation to another, in accordance with a law we do not understand, so a mind is thus molded upon the model of another in a way we cannot fully explain. A man and his wife, after years of intercourse, if they are not antagonistic, and if they are influenced in the same manner and strive to conform their ideas upon different subjects to those of the other, will as every one knows, become to resemble each other in character, in disposition and modes of thought, often—as the bent of mind in some degree controls and modifies the physiogomy—they will resemble each other more and more in person and in carriage.

What traveler has not observed that in cities, generally of moderate size, where the population is fixed and observations not confused by the elements connected with immigration that there is a certain similarity between the great mass of inhabitants in general appearance, and if we observe closely, we will find that this similarity does not depend upon family relationship or admixture of kin, but is to be ascribed to some subtle and illy understood effect of the principle spoken of above—photographing, so to speak, the attributes of the one upon the other, or rather perhaps, as the artist gradually molds and fashions his clay in conformity with the model, so the contour of the individuals gradually shape themselves into some degree of conformity, the one with the other. Insanity is but a higher degree of that perturbation of intellect we call eccentricity; take a mind—normal and healthy in its manifestations—as a standard, and every marked deviation from that standard, we term eccentricity, this may appear in so marked a dress that the individual may seem a strange being, wholly and unaccountably different from his fellows, and yet we do not call it insanity; yet if the same condition be increased to a greater degree it may reach the point where it manifests itself as, and assumes the name of—insanity, it being in either stage an abnormal state of the mind, one or more faculties being perverted by an illy proportioned degree of activity.

Apply now the above facts to the case in point; the mother,

shaken as she would be by the unnatural, and to her, horrible death of the father (which was suicidal), had, through the effect of that shock, and by a continual brooding upon the event gradually permitted herself to take a sombre view of life; her grief heightened in effect by her lonely and isolated condition, acted upon her mind so that it was unable, first, to throw off those depressing thoughts and finally permitted it to sink slowly into a state of melancholy; her emotional nature was perverted, her mental powers weakened, from a strong and self-reliant, she became a weak and confiding woman, trusting and clinging to her youthful son for support, and just in proportion as her mind lost its resiliency and strength, so it was more easily effected by the events and thoughts which first led it to that condition; the one act that had shocked her, loomed up prominent to her sight and acquired new shapes of horror to her view, until the same propensity, gradually but irresistibly, and in accordance with the principles enumerated above, took possession of her and she was led captive against her will.

There are two forms of suicidal insanity, one in which the individual desires to end existence and perhaps feels an unaccountable pleasure in it, the other, in which he struggles against a power which impells him whither he would not go; the latter is the form in which it manifested itself in the mother. Nothing could be more graphic or more true to the known working of this form of insanity than the night scene, where the son, unperceived by the mother enters the room and views her struggling against this dread influence implanted there through her own long engendered and brooding thoughts, and heard the wailing of the soul to God—

“O God,” she said, “my Father and my Friend,

“Spare him to me, and save me from myself!

“O! if thou help me not—if thou forsake—

“This hand which thou hast made, will take the life

“Thou mad'st the hand to feed.

“O! Father! Father! Hear me when I call!

“Hast thou not made me? Am I not thy child?

“Why, this mad, mysterious desire

“To follow him I loved, by the dark door

“Through which he forced his passage to the realm

“That death throws wide to all? O why must I,

“A poor, weak woman”—

The derangement of her faculties gradually increased until the



controlling power of her will was wholly overcome and the dread impulse was unrestrained ; the love and tenderness was supplanted by a horrible hate, and she accused her son of “ crimes my language could not name, and deeds which only outcast wretches know.”

Then the catastrophe, long fought against and dreaded, occurs ; stealing forth in the silent night she with “ guiltless hand took her life.”

This was the *finale* of a suicidal impulse engendered, not through hereditary transmission, or by any fixed organic disease of the brain, but by means of the gradual cultivation of certain propensities or faculties.

The next we will notice are two points as brought to view in the death scene of the Christian wife—the interview with angelic beings, her mission back to earth—her advice to and pleading with her husband—the effect upon him, are all of interest psychologically.

The first is where the tingling of the bell in the sick room is heard by the husband as he reclines in the yard ; he has been in a reverie, and as soon as the sound reaches him there rushes to his remembrance an incident of the by-gone, when he chased the lamb, guided by the little bell around its neck—to the mountain heights, where having caught it he stops to view “ scenes as beautiful as rests beneath the sun,” that were spread out before him, and then comes up the words of his mother when upon his return he meets her.

“ My Paul has climbed the noblest mountain-height

“ In all his little world, and gazed on scenes

“ As beautiful as rest beneath the sun.

“ I trust he will remember all his life

“ That, to his best achievement, and the spot

“ Closest to heaven his youthful feet have trod,

“ He has been guided by a guileless lamb.

“ It is an omen that his mother's heart

“ Will treasure with her jewels.”

And with it all a feeling of sublimity steals over him—a fear of some coming avenger, and he enters the house with strange forebodings:

“ From dreams of retrospective joy I woke

At last, to the quick tinkle of a bell.

My wife had touched it. She had been asleep,

And, wakeing, called me to her side.

Another bell,

With other music, rang adown the years  
That lay between me and the golden day  
When, up the mountain-path I followed far  
The lamb that bore it. All the scene came back  
In a broad flash; and with it came the same  
Strange apprehension of a mighty change—”

We think, viewing it as an actual occurrence, and speaking of it psychologically, the explanation is simple and that it contains no mystery—the tinkling of the sick room bell will explain it all; it found him in a state of revery, with his thoughts wandering to and fro, upon the as yet unremembered event, with the mind ready to be influenced by anything that should present itself to it, and by the laws of association of ideas, the sound of the one bell brought vividly before him the incidents connected with the sound of the other, we cannot completely comprehend, much less explain those laws; we only know that they exist, but how many links are in the chain—whether from bell to bell was one or a dozen, we can't know; the chase; the view from the mountain top; the return and meeting, and words of the mother, are flashed upon him with the known rapidity of thought, but why this foreboding of a coming disaster? Did it “cast its shadow before” in a sense which was unaccountable? We think not; the revery he was in, the remembrance of the past, and the events around him, all conspired to cast over him a feeling of gloom and sadness, in fact closely verging upon, if not entering a state of melancholia; a state which tinged all subsequent ideas, thoughts, which without this might have entered and brought no sadness, took to themselves a somber hue, and that which before might have been viewed with a careless eye and cast aside, sank deep and impressively into his troubled mind; he saw shapes and heard sounds of dread import.

The language of that bell he well knew; it called the wants of a sick wife, a wife whose changed condition was perhaps in his thoughts, the special wants he did not know; a feeling of fear and solicitude stole over him, what if there was some sudden danger? Some change which called promptness? Those were naturally the thoughts which would occur under such circumstances. He did not, nor could he, except as a matter of chance, know of the vision of his wife, or that she was about to recount to him the words that his mother had uttered long ago, and even had his forebodings



taken definite shape it would have been but a strange coincidence. Thoughts are by an old heathen poet or philosopher likened to the motes that float in the atmosphere. Some are caught up, selected and retained. Others are taken at random and retained or cast off, still others glisten in the light for an instant, and then swiftly they pass out of sight; to come again, it may be at any time and when least expected. Impress the form of a substance upon a bright polished surface, remove again, but it leaves no visible trace. Still the mystic touch of moisture brings out the picture and it appears like the work of enchantment. It has been photographed and only awaits the proper agency to stand revealed.

Is it not upon some such principle that the "unconscious cerebration" of Dr. Carpenter occurs? or rather is it not a proper illustration of such a state? As no one can tell when the proper agency will act, every one is taken by surprise at the seemingly inopportune appearance of such ideas; it needs only the inciting thought and the grand law of "association of ideas" to form a "golden clue" that leads to the solution. The second point to be considered is the wife's vision. She ascends to mingle with bright throngs above; meets one who tells her, as one having authority, that she will be a permanent participant of those joys; but first she must return to earth and complete her work—that of leading her husband into the path that should conduct him thither. One who repeated the words his mother had spoken years before and which but a moment ago, at the tinkling of the bell, the husband had remembered. If we attempt to analyze the above conditions the question arises, did she know those parts which composed the body of her vision? Or was the form and words of the mother, for it was she, presented to the wife in a supernatural manner? Was her spirit indeed holding commune with the heavenly Host? The only true plan to solve such problems is to explain them upon rational grounds. The rational explanation of phenomena has taken the place of all others. The common and popular belief, viz.: that spiritual forms actually manifest themselves to the material senses under certain circumstances, is a relic of ignorance. The natural laws govern both mind and matter; how in accordance with such laws, shall we explain such phenomena as are found here?

The Rev. Dr. Barnes has advanced the opinion that inspiration is but a state or condition of the mind between genius and insanity; first the common mind, then genius, then inspiration and finally



insanity. We may at first suppose that this would divest inspiration of its divine origin; but we must remember that divinity always manifests itself through humanity, if divinity speaks, it is by men, and no new organs are added. The faculties they possess may be increased by development, and it may be disproportionately so.

In genius the perceptive faculties are almost always more highly developed than in the common mind; the few see, what numbers blindly pass by; the mists that shut in the views of the masses, are pierced by the keen vision of the endowed; a fog, cold and murky envelopes the millions, and they grope through it gathering here and there a jewel which lies near them.

But genius seems to bear with it a lens that concentrates the beams of light, dispelling the gloom and revealing plainly the distant or before hidden object; and while the faculties are thus sharpened and enabled to catch the ideas and mold into shape those thoughts which the common mind cannot receive—we are apt to look upon it as something unaccountable and mysterious.

Somewhat the same conditions of mind no doubt exist in such cases, of which the one under consideration may be taken as a type. What caused this heightened development, this keenness of perception, need not be inquired into. Disease, without doubt, had much to do with it. At the same time the concentrated attention of the individual upon certain points, while all others were excluded, would have a great effect in procuring the same result.

This, in fact, was but a lower condition of the mental faculties that we find in insanity, a preternaturally heightened imagination, with hallucinations and illusions, where the functions of the nerves of sight and hearing were intensified, affected with hyperæsthesia; we may indeed with truth call it insanity, if we are careful to remember, that a name is *but* a name, and that a condition is known to exist, only as certain effects are manifested. The dying wife was evidently a monomaniac upon that one subject and her thoughts directed in the course they were, viz.: the belief in the appearance and presence of heavenly messengers—by the influence of early education and preconceived ideas, which taught her to give form, and therefore power of speech and action to spiritual beings, and the coming of such to waft the Christian spirit to its heavenly abode. It was thus that everything was ready in order for her heightened faculties and perturbed nerves to act, so that

to her the sound of their acclaims and flutter of their wings were a reality.

We by no means assert that no communication takes place between the humanity and divinity; spirit may recognize spirit, but matter is only cognizant of its like. The psychic force is without doubt a creation of the imagination, and the supposed direct interview between spirit and matter is a perversion of a higher faith, having its basis in ignorance, against which the correct teachings of the revealed word and of science will have to contend.

All history is full of examples of such convictions; the fathers of the desert, those anchorites of early Christianity, were fair samples; their ignorance, superstition, concentrated attention, suppressed animal desires, previous education and isolated condition—all aided in placing in a pathological condition certain physiological functions or qualities. Many other points of interest throughout the work might be noticed, but we shall leave it with the choice morsels found therein.

